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The Maritime Landscape of the Isthmus of Panamá

James P. Delgado, Tomás Mendizábal, Frederick H. Hanselmann, and Dominique Rissolo, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2016. 283 pp., 81 figs., 5 maps, index. \$84.95 cloth

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One of the greatest challenges in writing an overview of maritime history and archaeology for a region, particularly in a postcolonial or colonial context, is balancing prehistoric and indigenous histories. These narratives are often intangible, unwritten, and rely on ephemeral archaeological evidence. In comparison, historical and colonial history is rich with textual sources and therefore more accessible and palpable. In its approach and presentation, *The Maritime Landscape of the Isthmus of Panamá* is a fine example of striking that equilibrium. Case in point, the book opens with the maritime history and archaeology of the indigenous peoples of Panamá and concludes with those very same people, highlighting the struggles they continue to face in their ever changing and adapting use of the maritime cultural landscape. The authors' success in harmonizing precolonial and colonial histories is undoubtedly linked with their choice of theoretical exploratory models, that of the maritime cultural landscape, coined first by Christer Westerdahl in 1992. Following in the footsteps of other exceptional examples of the application of maritime cultural landscapes such as McErlean et al.'s (2002) *Strangford Lough: An Archaeological Survey of the Maritime Cultural Landscape*, James P. Delgado, Tomás Mendizábal, Frederick H. Hanselmann, and Dominique Rissolo take the reader on a journey through the hundreds and even thousands of years of maritime exploration, use, and extraction of a very distinctive piece of

geography that was seen as both practical and magical to those who settled, colonized, and clashed over it. Strengthening the historical narrative further still is the authors' complementary application of world systems theory, which provides a much needed macroscale approach to what could be a distinctly narrow scope on a singular geographic region. The combined lens created by incorporating both maritime cultural landscape and world systems theory approaches allows for a single transparent yet compound view of how the geography and bathymetry was both significant to its occupants and crucial to the wider world's economic and power structures.

The book consists of eight chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, beginning with the prehistory of the region and bringing the reader fully into its modern era. The introduction provides a brief on the geographic and environmental setting and the theoretical context through which the history and archaeology are examined. Best told by the authors, the region "is examined from a maritime-cultural perspective so that the physical environment and the stamp of human endeavor upon it can be reconceptualized through a maritime-focused lens" (p. 6). Chapter 1 is exemplary of this approach, solidly focusing on the prehistory of the region from the earliest evidence for colonization by the first peoples through to the initial contact by Europeans. Without devaluing important terrestrial activities such as agricultural slash-and-burn practices, the authors squarely focus on the interactions and connections with the sea using both tangible and intangible evidence such as iconography, place names, traditional boat building, settlement patterns, navigation, and trade systems.

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Chapter 2 is the first of two chapters that focus primarily on the exploration and colonization of the region by the Spanish and other European powers. Exploration by its very nature is a maritime venture and as such much attention is paid to the mode of transportation through evidence of shipwrecks and the development of early fortifications and settlements at the junctures between land and sea. Well-known and lesser-known examples of historical shipwrecks, settlements, and fortifications sites as well as transportation corridors demonstrate the infiltration of Spanish settlement and the impact this had on the maritime landscape and indigenous peoples.

Chapter 4 considers other European endeavors and challenges to Spanish colonial authority through the investigation of buccaneering, piracy, and attempts at colonization by England and Scotland. The authors also discuss how indigenous peoples attempted to defend and evade Spanish encroachments by relocating to offshore islands. The Spanish, however, focused their efforts on strengthening their existing defenses at Portobelo and San Lorenzo and relocating the city center of Panamá City to Casco Viejo. Examinations of significant archaeological sites include traces of Henry Morgan's 1671 attack at Panamá Viejo and Rio Chagres and the short-lived 17th-century Scottish colony of New Edinburgh in Darién. Chapter 5 focuses on the late 18th and early 19th centuries during which Spanish shipping within the region declined and challenges to their hegemony continued, eventually culminating in increases in illicit trade and the War of Jenkins' Ear. Rather than trying to encompass all of the history and sites related to this period, the authors skillfully focus on one significant point of entry, the Chagres River.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide the macrocosmic view of Panamá, which situates the isthmus as one of the most important transit points in the world with relation to trade and commerce. Delgado, a recognized scholar of the Gold Rush, contributes to the narrative of how this metallurgical phenomenon significantly altered the land and seascape of the transisthmian zone, which became vital to the

transmission of gold, freight, people, and mail via waterways, overland routes, and eventually railroads. While the influence of world systems theory is recognizable in relation to economy, the thread of maritime cultural landscape continues to flow throughout these chapters and finds welcome interludes in the discussion of the cognitive landscape that "is reflected in the place names" (p. 155). It is further noted on official maps, acknowledgment of the local waterfront and boatmen who worked the ports, a small pearling industry that left arguably the strangest anomaly on the watery landscape, the Civil War-era *Sub Marine Explorer*, and finally the failed French attempt at building a canal at the end of the 19th century.

Chapter 8 covers the period just after Panamá wrested independence from Columbia only to fall into the trappings of an "American invasion" with the construction of the Panamá Canal and the creation of the Canal Zone. The story of the construction of the canal is a familiar one, but the authors find new and interesting aspects to focus on including the lighthouses that serviced the waterborne trade and the build-up in fortifications protecting international commerce. The conclusion, as stated above, revisits the maritime cultural landscape concept and concedes that the future of the indigenous peoples of the isthmus continues to be at risk with the threat of climate change, deforestation, and decreasing water quality, but also a new modern chapter involving the further expansion of the Panamá Canal for the super post-Panamax ships.

This book provides a wealth of information and will serve to broaden the way we look at Panamá's history and maritime heritage. Truly a team effort, this book is a well-written, easily digestible academic work that successfully combines intimate archaeological research with wide-ranging historical investigations into the economic, political, and social maritime history of the isthmus. It would be a welcome addition to any historical enthusiast's shelf or even the graduate student who might be interested in how complex theoretical ideas can be made easily accessible.